



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2020

Cyprus

FREE

94

/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	38 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	56 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

94 /100 **Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Note

The numerical scores and status listed here do not reflect conditions in Northern Cyprus, which is examined in a separate report.

Overview

The Republic of Cyprus is a democracy that has de jure sovereignty over the entire island. In practice, however, the government controls only the southern, largely Greek-speaking part of the island, as the northern area is ruled by the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), recognized only by Turkey. Political rights and civil liberties are generally respected in the Republic of Cyprus. Ongoing concerns include societal discrimination against minority groups and weaknesses in the asylum system.

Key Developments in 2019

- In the May elections for Cyprus's six seats in the European Parliament (EP), four parties won representation. One candidate, Niyazi Kızılyürek of the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), became the first ethnic Turkish Cypriot to be elected to the EP or to win office in the Republic of Cyprus since 1964.
- The country continued to experience year-on-year increases in the number of arriving migrants and asylum seekers, putting additional strain on the government's ability to house them and process their cases in a fair and timely manner.
- In June, an army officer received multiple prison sentences for the serial murders of five foreign women and two of their children. The murders prompted public discussion concerning the exploitative conditions faced by many migrant domestic workers in Cyprus.

TOP

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

4/4

The president is elected by popular vote for five-year terms. The current president, Nicos Anastasiades of the center-right Democratic Rally (DISY), won a second term with 56 percent of the vote in a 2018 runoff against Stavros Malas, who was backed by the left-wing AKEL. The two had outpolled seven other candidates in the first round. International observers found that the overall election process adhered to democratic principles.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

4/4

The unicameral House of Representatives has 80 seats filled through proportional representation for five-year terms. The Turkish Cypriot community has 24 reserved seats, which have been unfilled since Turkish Cypriot representatives withdrew from the chamber in 1964.

In the 2016 legislative elections, which were held in accordance with international standards, DISY led the voting with 18 seats, down slightly from 2011, followed by AKEL with 16, also a decline. The Democratic Party (DIKO) received 9 seats, the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK) took 3, and the Green Party secured 2. Three new parties won seats for the first time: the far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) took 2, while 3 each went to the center-left Citizens' Alliance (SYPOL) and the right-wing Solidarity, an offshoot of DISY.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

4/4

Electoral laws are generally fair. In their report on the 2018 presidential vote, election monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) noted some improvements since the 2013 contest, including 2017 legal changes that abolished most mandatory-voting provisions and established a ceiling of €1 million (\$1.1 million) for candidates' campaign spending. The report found that the election was administered in a "highly professional, efficient, and transparent manner."

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

4/4

A wide array of parties compete in the political system. Cyprus's two main parties, DISY on the right and AKEL on the left, usually split the largest share of the vote, but neither has dominated politics, and other parties are often able to play significant roles. Both DISY and AKEL lost seats in the 2016 parliamentary elections, and despite an increase in the vote threshold for representation, from 1.8 percent to 3.6 percent, three new parties were able to enter the parliament. In the May 2019 EP elections, four parties won representation: DISY and AKEL with two seats each, and DIKO and EDEK with one each.

TOP

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

4/4

Cyprus has experienced regular democratic transfers of power between rival parties in recent decades, and multiple opposition parties are able to gain representation in the legislature.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?	4/4
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People are generally able to express their political choices without undue interference from outside actors.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	3/4
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Three recognized Christian minorities—the Armenians, the Latins, and the Maronites—each have one nonvoting representative in the parliament. Members of these minority groups vote in special elections for their representatives, as well as in the general elections. The Turkish Cypriot community's 24 seats remain unfilled. However, in the 2019 EP elections, Niyazi Kızılyürek of AKEL became the first Turkish Cypriot to be elected to the EP or to win office in the Republic of Cyprus since 1964.

Women in Cyprus have equal political rights, but they are underrepresented in political parties. No parliamentary party is led by a woman, and parties have failed to meet internal quotas mandating that 30 to 35 percent of their candidates be women. Women hold about 18 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives. No women ran for president in 2018. Sexism and patriarchal attitudes discourage women from playing a more active role in politics.

The interests of the LGBT+ community, which still faces significant discrimination from some sectors of society, are not always well represented in the political system.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

4/4

The freely elected government is able to make and implement policy without improper interference from unelected entities.

In a further sign of the country's recovery from a 2013 banking crisis and the subsequent period of policy constraints imposed by international creditors, in September 2019 Cyprus repaid in full—two years ahead of schedule—a €2.5 billion (\$2.8 billion) Russian loan it had negotiated in late 2011 as the crisis developed.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

3/4

Cyprus has strong anticorruption laws that are, for the most part, adequately enforced. However, there have been a number of high-profile corruption scandals in recent years, and critics of the government's record have raised concerns about early releases and pardons of individuals convicted on corruption charges.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

4/4

In general, the government operates with openness and transparency. The country ^{TOP} enacted a long-awaited freedom of information law in late 2017, though civil society activists had argued that the bill's exemptions were too broad.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	4/4
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Freedom of speech is constitutionally guaranteed, and media freedom is generally respected. A vibrant independent press frequently criticizes the authorities. Numerous private outlets compete with public media, and there are no restrictions on access to online news sources.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	4/4
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Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution and generally protected in practice. Nearly 90 percent of those living in government-controlled Cyprus are Orthodox Christians, and the Orthodox Church enjoys certain privileges, including religious instruction and some religious services in public schools. Non-Orthodox students may opt out of such activities. The government recognizes Muslim religious institutions and facilitates crossings at the UN buffer zone between north and south for the purpose of worship at religious sites. Muslim groups have occasionally faced obstacles in the operation of their religious sites. Other religious minorities sometimes encounter discrimination.

TOP

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from	
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extensive political indoctrination?

3/4

Academic freedom is respected in Cyprus. However, state schools use textbooks containing negative language about Turkish Cypriots and Turkey, and there is some political pressure regarding schools' treatment of sensitive historical and unification-related issues.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

4/4

People are generally free to engage in political and other sensitive discussions without fear of retribution or surveillance.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

4/4

Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

4/4
TOP

Nongovernmental organizations are generally free to operate without government interference.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	4/4
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Workers have the right to strike, form independent trade unions, and engage in collective bargaining. The law provides remedies for antiunion discrimination, though enforcement is uneven.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	4/4
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The judiciary, which operates principally according to the British tradition, is independent in practice. Supreme Court judges are appointed by the president on the recommendation of the court's existing members, and lower court judges are appointed by Supreme Court judges in their capacity as the Supreme Council of Judicature.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	4/4
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The justice system generally upholds due process standards. Law enforcement agencies largely observe safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, and criminal defendants have access to counsel and fair trial procedures.

TOP**F3** 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	4/4
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Residents of Cyprus are free from major threats to physical security, though human rights monitors have noted cases of police brutality. Overcrowding and other problematic conditions have been reported at prisons and migrant detention centers.

In an attempt to block Cyprus's efforts to explore for offshore oil and gas, Turkey has threatened to use force against drilling vessels. Ankara argues that the maritime areas in question are under the jurisdiction of either Turkey or the TRNC.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

3/4

Despite government efforts to combat prejudice and inequality, non-Greek Cypriot minorities, including migrants and asylum seekers, face discrimination and occasional violence. In June 2019, an army officer was sentenced to seven terms of 25 years in prison for the serial murders of five women migrant workers and two children between 2016 and 2018. Police were accused of failing to properly investigate the women's initial disappearances because of their marginalized status in society; most were household workers. A month before the sentencing, the police chief was dismissed and the justice minister resigned.

The country has received rapidly increasing numbers of migrants and asylum seekers in recent years. There were more than 13,000 new asylum applications in 2019, compared with about 7,800 in 2018 and 4,600 in 2017. The influx has created a large backlog of asylum cases, which can take several years to process; a specialized administrative court began operating in June 2019 to handle appeals. While many newcomers are quickly released from overburdened reception centers, they often lack access to other housing.

Gender discrimination in the workplace remains a problem, including with respect to hiring practices, salaries, and sexual harassment; laws against it have not been adequately enforced.

Antidiscrimination laws generally prohibit bias based on sexual orientation, and there are legal protections for transgender people on some issues as well. For example, laws barring incitement to hatred apply to both sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the LGBT+ community continues to face societal discrimination in practice.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

3/4

There are few impediments to freedom of movement within the government-controlled area of the Republic of Cyprus. The UN buffer zone dividing the island remains in place, though travel between north and south has improved since 2004 due to an increase in the number of border crossings. In 2018, two new crossing points opened at Deryneia and Lefka-Aplici.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

4/4

Property rights are generally respected in Cyprus. A 1991 law stipulates that property left by Turkish Cypriots after 1974, when a Turkish invasion divided the island, belongs to the state. Under the law in the north, Greek Cypriots can appeal to the Immovable Property Commission (IMP), which in 2010 was recognized by the European Court of Human Rights as a responsible authority for the resolution of property disputes. However, its work has been seriously impaired in recent years by a lack of funding from the TRNC and Ankara.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

4/4

Personal social freedoms are largely unrestricted. Same-sex civil unions are allowed under a 2015 law, but it did not include adoption rights for same-sex couples. Since 2017, the government has been considering legislation that would establish a procedure to correct one's legal gender. Domestic violence remains a problem despite official efforts to prevent and punish it. Two government-funded shelters are open to survivors of domestic abuse.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

3/4

The legal framework generally protects workers against exploitative conditions of employment, and the government has made genuine progress in combating human trafficking. However, persistent problems include a lack of resources for labor inspectors and illegally low pay for undocumented migrant workers. Migrant workers and asylum seekers remain vulnerable to sexual exploitation and forced labor. The serial murders exposed in 2019 prompted a broader public discussion concerning the difficult conditions that many migrant domestic workers face in Cyprus.

**TOP****On Cyprus**

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

94/100 Free

Other Years

2019

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